

OP-EDS

THE GOP, THE BOXES, AND THE UBER

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Chinatown, Manhattan, New York City 2009 on Pell Street, looking west towards Bayard and Mott. (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

On August 4, Vikas Bajaj devoted a *New York Times* [op-ed](#) to the politics of Uber. The headline contends that “Republicans Are Trying to Turn Uber Into a Partisan Issue,” and that companies like Uber and Airbnb based in the “gig economy” rather than the 9-to-5 realm “hardly fit into the kind of neat ideological boxes in which Republicans would like to put them.”

Bajaj then attempts to turn Uber into a partisan issue, fitting it into the Democrats’ neat ideological boxes. Republicans spotlighting startups with hi-tech cool and youth appeal is exposed as a ploy to distract from their reactionary stands on issues like same-sex marriage. This is in no way like Bill Clinton [playing the sax on TV](#) while rubber-stamping the Defense of Marriage Act away from the cameras.

To Bajaj, Uber’s “aggressively challenging or flouting taxi regulations” appeals to Republicans’ hostility toward the regulatory state (ignoring the key role of Democratic stalwarts like Ted Kennedy and Jimmy Carter in trucking deregulation misses an opportunity to score partisan points.)

Bajaj's model is the detente between New York City mayor Bill de Blasio and Uber, two brash upstarts whose confrontational image is rapidly yielding to accommodation with the status quo. Not that de Blasio's radical imagination ever approached that of true mavericks like Paul and Percival Goodman, whose 1961 remedy for Manhattan's traffic congestion featured **specialized half-length, electric-powered, 40-MPH cabs**.

Bajaj notes that conservatives have backed municipal restraints on Uber, showing how "the political influence of established local businesses and labor groups" trumps professed ideology. Indeed, Bajaj points out support in Uber's management for Obamacare "which Republicans love to hate" (but the templates of which Republicans like Mitt Romney designed to offload labor costs).

Professionals benefit in obvious ways from prohibitions on less skilled and informal competition. But contra the mythology of overpaid, underworked employees running the asylum, labor has always been a subsidiary partner in the corporate liberal coalition, in capital-intensive industries where it accounts for a relatively small proportion of operating costs. The same grassroots pressure that compelled General Motors to accede to United Automobile Workers can be applied to Uber.

Bajaj concludes that if economics doesn't do the job, demographics will, with diverse millennials a captive constituency of the Democrats. Thus, as the Goodmans observed, voting is "according to ethnic and party groupings. The rival programs are both vague and identical." In the 1970s, the *Times* was so charitable to the nascent libertarian movement (whose political party already officially supported same-sex marriage) that two of its young voices were given **space in *The New York Times Magazine*** to call JFK "one of the leading reactionaries of the sixties." Mentioning that Uber's CEO "holds libertarian views" only to lump them into the red-state side of the aisle, Bajaj is four decades behind the times. Where we're riding, we need neither Republicans nor Democrats to build roads.

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PUBLICATION/CITATION HISTORY

- **"The GOP, the Boxes, and the Uber,"** by Joel Schlosberg, *Ventura County, California Citizens Journal*, 08/07/15
- **"The GOP, the boxes, and the Uber,"** by Joel Schlosberg, *South Coast Today* [Massachusetts], 08/09/15
- **"The economy is evolving faster than partisan politics,"** by Joel Schlosberg, *Libby, Montana Western News*, 08/11/15